

# Identity Positioning: A Macroscopic View On Personal Branding

**Written by Isaac Mashman**

With the creation and adoption of technology over the last two decades such as social media, personal video at scale, and artificial intelligence, the consumer market has evolved drastically. Whereas the barrier of entry to be a celebrity was extremely high for the entirety of the 20th century, now through social media and content creation, anybody can go from a nobody to an influential somebody. From having zero followers to audiences of millions in a relatively short amount of time. This can be dehumanizing, making these interactions feel superficial.

These shifts in the market have led to the mass adoption of endorsement marketing where everybody, including their grandparents, wants to be an influencer. It's no longer a movie star advertising Old Spice or Marilyn Monroe wearing Chanel perfume. There is this desire, whether driven by vanity, money, or mission, to become famous and at the very least have successful personal brands. In parallel, more ranking executives are choosing to become front-facing and serve as public representatives for their corporations. It conversely humanizes what were once bland corporations run by men in black suits. Interestingly, the CEOs or founders often have larger audiences than the businesses themselves. Personality sells.

Upon observing the rapid changes in our consumer behavior, I developed what I believe is the next evolution of personal branding. I call my approach **Identity Positioning**, and it is the one thing many people today lack. It merges the personal identity of the individual with their professional career in such a way that crafts public authority, demonstrates competence, develops a loyal following, and is effective regardless of how the world landscape changes. This is a philosophy in so much as it is a strategy and will be the standout approach for years to come.

Whether you are finding yourself lost in this new generation of advancement, or are looking to attain a certain outcome by being a part of the leaders, not the consumers, I hope my study will lead you to be more effective in your own personal brand's progression and offer new perspectives on the subject.

## What Is Personal Branding?

The first widely known use of the term "*personal brand*" can be found in Tom Peters' article for *FastCompany*, "*The Brand Called You*." For being written in 1997, Tom was way ahead of the curve. Most who use the phrase "personal brand" don't know that it was only coined within the last three decades. This particular piece is worth reading and is foundational for much of the work that is done in the space today. Although Peters put a lot of emphasis on professional characteristics in more of a corporate-America setting, I believe it served its purpose when it was written and the impact it has had is undeniable. I'd like to expand on Mr. Peters' work and

usher in the next era of personal branding, more appropriate for the ever-evolving time we live in.

In my professional life, I've had the pleasure of consulting clients from numerous industries and verticals such as authors, business owners, coaches, consultants, creators, entertainers, models, podcasters, public speakers, and more. I am proud to say that my approach has always been identifying my clients' personal traits and interests while seamlessly combining them with their professional careers and outlook. Over the last decade, I have sought depth in my work—some sort of secret sauce that helps me feel like we are digging deeper than the surface and focusing on the broader approach of an individual's image.

## Where Personal Brand Professionals Go Wrong

I find most of my competitors in the space, who also provide personal brand coaching or consulting in some official capacity, usually lack substance in terms of their vision. They focus on micro-strategies, addressing one or two concerns without taking into account a broader approach to their client's needs and ambitions. They make suggestions like "*Let's grow your social media page*" but won't discuss how they're being perceived. Work to have them show up on Google, yet avoid getting their clients a personal website. This is why, at large, I only consume a little content, if at all, from others in my space. Additionally, many times my "*colleagues*" implement short-term strategies themselves, paying for awards and press, rather than becoming press-worthy. You aren't in the business of convincing, but rather in demonstrating.

There's a common phrase in sales that states '*people do business with whom they know, like, and trust.*' If this is the case, why is so much emphasis put on professional accolades and marketing messages, yet the most crucial aspects are nowhere to be found? People write sales scripts such as "*I help coaches make X amount of revenue in Y time frame*" and "*Working with so-and-so clients to get so-and-so results*" and expect it to convert. They rarely showcase their *human* side out of fear that it would affect their broader '*image*' oftentimes limiting their phrasing and creation strictly to their professional career like an uptight lawyer.

While It is true that showing too much of your personal life without showcasing your professional experiences may affect the psychological distance between you and the other person, what if there was a better way? A balance to strike? This is why, after observing these trends, I created this unique philosophical and strategic approach that allows anybody to position themselves as a public figure worth following, liking, and trusting—somebody who can be in demand and serve as an authority while also being down to earth.

*When I made the decision to consciously build my personal brand everything changed.* I don't come from a well-known family, I didn't have mentors around me who could guide me on this new path, and I lacked the tools that I needed to grow. I had to build myself up as much as I had to build my personal brand. I lacked public significance but followed every step that I laid out for you in this thought piece. I prefer this macroscopic view because it offers security and room for expansion. It doesn't matter if one marketing platform disappears, your account gets removed,

or other divine interventions change the tools at your disposal. Having a personal brand that is well-rounded and reflects YOU will encompass all the other avenues as extensions.

## How I Have Used Identity Positioning For My Personal Brand

In the early days of my career, I went from business to business, searching for my vehicle. My stress was exacerbated by not fully understanding *who I was*. Through my study, I knew obscurity was the enemy of success, ultimately leading me to build out my personal brand online in the least, as this ambitious young entrepreneur. In every new endeavor I got myself involved in, I had to my surprise, people supporting me. Why was that? It wasn't because I was some sort of authority. I hadn't the experience to become one. It was because they connected with me, Isaac Mashman. They saw my vision and that I was working on finding something greater for myself. They latched onto this and lived vicariously through me.

By the time I figured out what my vehicle was, I had a series of thousands of people who helped me get started, launch, and then build. It didn't matter if I was in a network marketing company, the music industry, podcast management, or a different avenue—they wanted to see me win. I built a connection with strangers on the internet that I eventually transmuted into a faithful following. I use the term faithful not in a religious sense, but in that it denotes avid support. If you ask your followers to do something, they happily oblige. Your CTAs (Calls-to-Action) convert because it's a friend who is asking, not a stranger.

## Practical Application In Marketing Messages

Imagine the word "*personal brand*" is split into two so it appears as **PERSONAL || BRAND**. On the left side, you have the word "*personal*." This consists of the characteristics, interests, hobbies, passions, traits, life experiences, and other aspects of an individual. It's what makes them that unique friend to have—the same reason some students get labeled the class clown or the most likely to succeed. On the right, you have "*brand*." This side is reserved for accomplishments, certifications, professional careers, years of service, testimonials, and things that generate revenue or attention in an industry-specific way. An immense number of people focus on the right side—the brand—and not so much on the person themselves.

Let us take the marketing message "*I help X people get Y results*." Starting with the words "*I help*" denote service and intimacy, but what if you added a personal hook to that marketing message? "*Avid outdoorsman and loving father. I help X people get Y results*." This small amount of context gives a prospective follower or buyer information that establishes rapport.

Rapport is trust, and in the digital space, it's not like you are literally shaking another person's hand and they're able to look you in your eyes and intuitively read you. However, you do have the ability to leave a first impression. The fact that the person is a fan of the outdoors and is a father gives two rapport pieces that similar professionals wouldn't have publicly displayed. This method helps visualize the *identity* of the person much more effectively, *positioning* them as someone trustworthy and personable. It applies to the nerdy business owner to the quirky dressed musician.

To properly understand **Identity Positioning**, and create a successful personal brand, there are four pillars that we need to go through to properly set a foundation.

## **Education: Understanding What Your Personal Brand Is**

Without understanding what your personal brand is, your perspective will be shortsighted. Your personal brand is YOU! Every single thing about you—from the place you were born, your career, your political affiliation, your faith, etc. It is not something that is only created because of technology and the internet. I could go completely off the grid electronically speaking tomorrow, and still go to my local Chamber of Commerce and connect with other business leaders. I could still provide services despite lacking an online presence. Combining both offline and online tactics is the hidden weapon that will create the greatest results in this new techno-social period. Understanding this pillar gives you a broad perspective that others lack and a deeper resonance in your *identity*.

## **Mindset: The Mindset of the Public Figure**

We have to think BIG. I need your comfort zone to be challenged and here's why. There are nearly 4 billion people today who are on the internet, if not more. Even if a fraction of those people are on the creating end of the spectrum, that is an immense amount of competition you are fighting to get attention with. I believe with the increasing accessibility of technology in hubs such as India and Africa, we will soon see a rise in more geographically centered influencers.

You should be positioned as an authority and as a public figure. You have to be the person that other people know and respect. There's no other way in today's age to combat this without losing out on opportunities. There will come a point where more people know about you, and you don't even know they exist.

You could be approached in public by somebody who has been following you for years and knows information about you, yet you might not know the first shred of details about them. A remarkable thought, isn't it? This phenomenon is best seen in the celebrity realm. You likely know a lot of facts about your favorite movie star, but they wouldn't know your first name. Managing your thinking in this pillar will help you set realistic expectations and why *positioning* is so important.

## **Branding: Who You Are and How You Position Yourself**

Knowing now that you have to be a public figure, how do you position yourself as such? This is where strategies that contribute to your credibility come into play.

**Some of these are as follows:**

- Receiving features and quotes in the press
- Podcast interviews
- Traditional forms of media communication such as radio and television appearances

- Creating content on your industry and subject matter
- Authorship
- Public speaking
- Writing articles and columns
- Associating with other leading professionals.

You are looking for ways to make yourself stand out and for third-party edification.

Edification is where another person talks highly about you, validating your claims. You can say that you are the greatest expert, but that comes across with bias. The expert is identified through other people vouching for them and is usually perceived better in terms of public opinion. Outside of being you, what do you want to be known for? A high-ticket consultant, an industry-leading public speaker, a loving advocate? Having an outcome in mind enables you to cut through the noise more easily and reverse engineer steps to get there, assisting in how you *position* yourself. Now it's about getting more awareness, hence, the fourth pillar of **Identity Positioning**, Marketing.

## **Marketing: How You Get More People To Know About You**

Marketing is arguably the easiest step of this process because every interaction that gets somebody to know about you is an example—from the handshake with a barista to advertisement campaigns to the strategies that I talked about earlier that contribute to your positioning.

It can be as simple as *The Power of 3*. Connecting with 3 new people every day for a year will grow your network by 1,095 people. Your ultimate goal with marketing yourself and your personal brand is to get more people to hear your name, and be introduced to what you stand for. From there, the content and tasks that you are doing enable that new fan or follower to learn information about what you have going on. Being educated in potential marketing channels gives you a competitive advantage in reaching more people who would latch on to your *identity*.

**Examples of marketing strategies are:**

1. The Power of 3
2. Direct marketing
3. Social media
4. Email marketing
5. Podcasting, both host and interviewee
6. Press features and quotes
7. Television and radio appearances
8. Attending events
9. Paid advertising

## **The Law of Familiarity**

There is what I call the Law of Familiarity. This Law refers to strangers becoming acquaintances and eventually becoming avid supporters. Think back to your first day of school. It always felt awkward at first, but by the end of the year, you had your friends, you knew everybody and they knew you. You knew your classes and teachers and were familiar. Your personal brand gets people familiar with *the business of you*. Edification is effective because the person providing the edification is familiar to their audience. You are going into the conversation a stranger and by introduction are leaving a vetted figure.

## **The Overarching Reasons Why You Want To Build Your Personal Brand**

Like a holding company is an umbrella for all of the businesses underneath it, there are three overarching reasons why somebody would build out their personal brand.

### **Vanity**

Simply put, people like attention. They like being recognized and want to be known for vanity or greed. This isn't a discussion on the moral ramifications of personal branding, but oftentimes entertainers especially like the idea of being famous. It makes you feel good!

### **Money**

Constructing your personal brand can be a fantastic vehicle for generating revenue. You can utilize your personal brand to drive awareness towards a business, receive compensation through sponsorships or affiliates, and get paid to speak on stage. Monetizing your personal brand is a fantastic testament to success and accomplishment. The consultant starting out might only be able to charge \$100 per consultation, but as their reputation grows and their personal brand scales, they can eventually charge as much as, or even more than, \$10,000 for an hour's worth of their time. They have a track record of results.

### **Mission**

Some may be driven by a sense of mission and purpose. They understand that the larger they become so does their ability to drive awareness to a cause they care about. This can be seen in the non-profit space with billionaire philanthropists. They are associating themselves with causes that they believe in and can put out calls to action for their audiences to do the same.

In your personal brand journey, you may be driven by one of or a combination of these three overarching reasons. It's important to note that they may be less or more influential than the others. Most of the time, people are held back because, number one, they do not know the reasons they are building their personal brand, or number two, they do not know where to get started.

**Identity Positioning** offers flexibility. It doesn't matter if your driving reasons change, the person doesn't. Of course, there's a buffer for your evolution, but it's unlikely people will stop supporting you unless some major personality fluctuations take place.

## How You Can Leverage Identity Positioning For Your Personal Brand

In leveraging **Identity Positioning**, and combining those personal and professional attributes, you are openly showcasing who you are and why they may be interested in aligning their lives with your own. Building your personal brand is the equivalent of building a business. What expectations for consumers are you setting? When you purchase a particular product or service from a business, you are expecting a certain outcome. You have been influenced over the years by so many marketing messages and decisions, from an entity's branding to the fact that Coca-Cola was your grandmother's favorite drink, ultimately leading you to make a purchasing decision. We are subconsciously influenced from the time we were children and as memories develop so do our biases.

What expectations are you setting for your personal brand? Your personal brand is not something that is built, optimized, or scaled overnight, rather is a continual process. I would argue you have had your personal brand from the moment you came out of your mother's womb. Your parents named you, determined where you were born, your associations and affiliations, and your beliefs. They nurtured into you all of those various aspects that make you who you are today, and your environment, your nature. That failed business you had, the degree you worked so hard for, your romantic pursuits, and so on.

### Answer the following questions:

1. What are you looking to gain from consciously establishing your personal brand? Is it vanity (seeking recognition), money, or mission (promoting causes)? Once you understand what is driving you, go through the four pillars and familiarize yourself with what they stand for. Seeing positive outcomes will only motivate you to take it more seriously.
2. Identify what you want to be known for. See the branding pillar for reference. Are you showing your personal side or limiting yourself to pure professionalism? It may take some time to strike a balance.
3. What are some easy and free marketing vehicles you can use to get more people to know about you? Test out strategies over the next several months and adjust them accordingly.
4. Reverse engineer other leaders who have similar results to what you want. This is one of the best ways to find the best path forward.

## Skyline Strategy

Implement the “*Skyline Strategy*” – For every 2 steps that grow the *brand* side, take 1 that grows your *personal*. All great cities have beautiful skylines. What does yours look like? In terms of videos that I record, I try to adhere to this 2:1 ratio to the best of my ability. I may record two videos about my consultancy or public relations, followed by one story from my past or of me doing things in my day-to-day like bicycling or hiking. I add context to the man. City skylines are constructed over time. Sometimes skyscrapers are added, other times they're demolished. Don't be afraid to switch up your marketing or pivot as you see fit. Sit down with pen and paper and

come up with ideas for content. Draw a T chart and categorize where that idea falls under. Personal or Profession? All consumed media does 4 things: *Educes, Entertains, Inspires/Motivates, and Connects.*

**Examples of *personal* content are:**

- Vlogs and “Day in the Life” videos
- Personal anecdotes
- Your day-to-day experiences like dinner, working out, your lifestyle
- Serious hobbies

**Examples of *brand* content are:**

- DIY tutorials
- Professional anecdotes
- Education oriented
- Client stories
- Career challenges

By diversifying your content, you are bridging the gap between you as the creator and the consumer. You must speak with enthusiasm and exhibit your personality. No one wants to follow a bore.

## **Using This Gift**

*Your personal brand is a gift.* It is something that you should cherish and respect. As your influence grows in magnitude, the more leverage you have to get opportunities to come to you rather than search for those opportunities yourself. You want to become sought after and set forth public commitments that you can use for personal gain. Have a foundation set in moral beliefs and follow the ethics of modern civilization to build for the long term.

Growing your personal brand is a lifetime endeavor. Be on the lookout for *cracks in your foundation*. Risks that could grow into something bigger. Address concerns as they come, associate with the right people, and what you wouldn’t talk about with associates, friends, and family, don’t talk about publicly. The smallest of efforts stack up. If you apply the principles of **Identity Positioning** you will assuredly stand out in this hypercompetitive environment and develop your own personal brand in such a way that leaves lasting impressions of increase, attracts opportunities, and helps you achieve your aspirations.

As your results compound reach out and let me know how **Identity Positioning** has helped you!

Do not abuse this gift, as it takes hundreds of years for the mightiest oak tree to be nurtured and grow, but only minutes for it to get cut down. Such is the qualm of reputation.

So, who are you?